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ABSTRACT

Comprehensive staff development approaches described in this paper are based on on-site work with school districts and a 1980 National Rural Project investigation of problems experienced by over 80 rural districts and cooperatives across the country as they attempted to implement staff development programs. Three models are described which employed staff development as a vehicle for change in rural districts; each process involved inter- and intra-school levels as well as rural communities. Model A is described as a management model which allowed members of the district to develop and implement strategies creating growth-promoting interaction for all who would influence children, including the handicapped child in the least restrictive setting. Model B is described as a comprehensive management information system which optimized school and community resources to implement special education mandates in ways beneficial to all students within individual schools/total districts. Model C is described as a trainer-of-trainers approach which was used on district-specific and statewide bases. The paper concludes that these models stem from value systems emphasizing (1) identification of resources as well as needs, (2) environmental monitoring of the local culture of a particular district and community subculture, and (3) identification of creative alternatives for use in the specific district, analyzing effectiveness as well as cost-efficiency. (BRR)

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INDIVIDUALIZING STAFF DEVELOPMENT IN RURAL SCHOOL DISTRICTS TO ENHANCE SERVICES FOR ALL CHILDREN, INCLUDING THE HANDICAPPED

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Rural Special Education Staff Development Needs

According to staff development literature, 15-25% of an employee's time should be spent in staff development experiences. In fact, many businesses appropriate two-thirds (67%) of staff members' time for learning new technologies. A figure of 15-25% would typically include 25-30 days of in-service per school year. Yet almost half (48%) of all respondents in a 1980 study of the National Rural Project (NRP) involving 75 rural districts and cooperatives in 17 states reported inadequate staff development programs. Many participants stated that their districts had no formal designated in-service days, much less comprehensive personnel development programs. Respondents generally linked inadequate staff development programs with staff retention problems (a severe problem in 94% of all states surveyed in a 1978-79 NRP study).

Special education demands and related inservice needs were reported to be especially problematic for rural school districts. All major aspects of Public Law 94-142, the Education of All Handicapped Children's Act, including the concept of least restrictive environment, due process procedures, individualized education programs (IEPs), and parent involvement were identified as problematic for rural schools. Rural districts were frequently unaware of alternate instructional and organizational strategies for special

needs populations; and sparse populations, low incidence handicaps, and climatic difficulties greatly inhibited delivery of special education services.

Given variables such as increased special education staff responsibilities and roles, inadequate funding for additional staff, and the phenomenon of teacher burn-out, districts reported that personnel development--difficult enough in rural areas given a stable personnel force--seldom reached beyond basic orientation to district and state philosophies. Implementing long-range plans for staff development was particularly difficult in rural areas as high attrition frequently necessitated re-initiation of personnel development each year or every two years. Professional isolation fostered limited access to formal staff development and technical assistance programs as well as informal professional sharing.

As stated in a major Rand Corporation report (Berman & McLaughlin, 1978), requisites for long-lasting effects of staff development include training addressed to specific needs of individual teachers and teacher encouragement and advice from peers experiencing success in the individual's problem area. The need for frequent formal and informal teacher consultation also became apparent via the 1978-80 NRP studies. Collaboration and the presence of local resource personnel able to provide "on call" advice has been identified as imperative in rural schools due to scarce resources and relative lack of access to universities and other sources of consultants.

Comprehensive literature reviews have clearly indicated that staff development programs are more successful if developed by a systematic plan emphasizing continuity and follow-up activities (Berman & McLaughlin, 1978; Lawrence, 1974; and Joyce, 1976). NRP work activities have also emphasized needs for inservice training based on needs assessment and collaborative

planning of those to be impacted by staff development programs; formal and informal debriefing, processing and follow-through after individual inservice activities; and multi-disciplinary cadre approaches.

Comprehensive staff development approaches described in this paper are based on on-site work with school districts and an NRP investigation of problems experienced by over 80 rural districts and cooperatives across the United States as they attempt to implement staff development programs.

Assumptions of the Described Processes

1. Mandated special education procedures as resources for total (systemic) school change. Mandated special education procedures such as development of the IEP should be used as opportunities for integrating the efforts of regular and special educators toward a common cause. IEP meetings should be used as vehicles for formal and informal inservice.

2. Exploiting the ripple effect for systemic change. Motivation (M) for systemic change and growth is composed of Discomfort (D) with the status quo and Realistic Hope (RH) for positive change (M = D + RH) The uncertainty and anticipation (D) stimulated by mandated change may be used for best advantage to the entire district (M) if personnel begin to understand true potential (RH) for long-term systemic benefits.

   Advantageous changes in special education components of a system such as individualized instruction and precision teaching will have positive impact on other components of the system. This "ripple effect" means that many special education innovations may be infused into the total educational system.

3. Districts are "resident experts" in need of developing organizational skills. Many rural districts lack organizational skills (e.g., grant writing, organizing comprehensive staff development programs, etc.). Yet school personnel are resident experts in local culture, history regarding past efforts and rates of success, problem content areas, local resources, power and communication systems, and other informal structures about which knowledge is imperative.

4. Importance of systemic change processes. Although it is paramount that staff development be individualized, it is equally important that schools implement systemic long-term change processes via all inservice or staff development activities.

Effective staff development programs involve multiple aspects--intra-school, inter-school, and community-school levels.

1978-80 NRP field activities consistently discerned that staff development procedures mandating personnel to collaboratively plan and prioritize activities for best use of scarce resources had longer lasting effects than districts merely awarding stipends or providing other vehicles for individual teachers to complete a personalized experience with no discerned relationship to total school growth and development needs. Inadequate resources of rural areas necessitate systemic change processes.

5. Broadened definition of staff development to meet needs of rural schools and communities. Staff development opportunities in rural areas must be considerate of teachers' specific needs as well as institutional goals and objectives. Rural staff development must include individual personal professional growth activities as well as problem identification and resolution activities designed to effectively meet building and district level needs.

6. Need for consistency in short- and long-term goals. Short-term activities must be building blocks for long-term goals. All activities should be designed to enhance systemic change while facilitating individual growth plans.

7. Necessity of administrative support and shared decision making. Various roles and disciplines representative of the school system should be involved in planning, implementation, evaluation, and follow-through of all phases of the district's staff development program. Inservice activities are most effective when planned by those to be integrally involved. Participation of administrators in training activities is essential.

8. Focus on support and intrinsic incentives. School staff need training and support to plan staff development activities effectively. This may include training in group process and conflict resolution skills.

   Adequate resources and reinforcement strategies are essential, and districts should optimally use the expertise of their own staff. Although external incentives such as recertification credits and stipends have value, research has indicated that intrinsic reinforcements are most beneficial for long-lasting change. As Lortie (1975) indicated, teachers choose their profession because of intrinsic rewards (reinforcement from children, etc.).

9. Value of varieties of staff development activities. Types of staff development activities are innumerable, ranging from

peer consultation to lecture. The critical variable is that districts systematically link each activity to others and provide for appropriate debriefing and sharing experiences.

10. Importance of cost-efficient models of rural staff development. Rural schools cannot afford specialized staff to assist in many legislated or rapid technological changes. Nor can they afford to purchase adequate professional and curricular resources in these areas. It is imperative that well planned cost-effective strategies be employed in districts with scarce resources.

11. Rural models for rural schools. Many urban inservice models have been implemented in rural schools without realization of unique rural subcultural needs, problems, culture, and values. This approach has typically insured failure or at best only short-term adoption of any innovation.

Description of Effective Processes for Rural Districts

The processes described below employed staff development as a vehicle for systemic change in rural districts. Each process involved inter- and intra-school levels as well as rural communities.

Each district carefully assessed needs, set goals, and planned activities congruent with local culture and value systems. Multiple incentives were incorporated.

Planning regarding target populations incorporated the following beliefs about compositions of school systems. The vast majority (80%) of most organizations consist of persons who are relatively "status quo" oriented and generally watch informal or formal organizational leaders for cues regarding enthusiasm about and pacing of work activities. Another 10% of most organisations consists of individuals who are self-directed and enthusiastic. Such individuals tend to create growth opportunities when they are not present. The remaining 10% of most organizations typically consists of individuals who not only do not care to be involved in professional growth opportunities, but, more importantly, frequently inhibit involvement of other individuals.

Given scarce resources, the rural districts described herein focused the majority of their planning and activities on the 10% of the staff who were most highly motivated toward growth opportunities, feeling that these individuals would provide formal and informal leadership for the 80% who were assessing the organizational climate. However, district personnel also attempted to change negative attitudes of the lower 10% of the organization's staff where possible, or at least to pacify them to the extent that they did not inhibit other individuals from being involved in staff development processes. Procedures for doing so ranged from intellectual discussions to "co-oping" recalcitrant individuals by publicly involving them with the project in staff development activities.

The successful models described below also incorporated staging small-scale pilot efforts, arranging for the individuals involved to experience success with those efforts, and exploiting rural community grapevines about effective strategies and processes.

Ownership was established in each process by securing planning input from persons at all levels and within all disciplines of the organization. Administrators were supportive but also integrally involved in staff development processes as were school board members, parents, and other community members.

In consonance with staff development literature, each program was developed by local district committees, using problem-solving approaches. Outside consultation and technical assistance was sometimes used in developing process components.

Model A

This project established a management model allowing members of the district to develop and implement strategies creating growth-promoting interaction among staff, students, and others who would influence all

children, including the handicapped child in the least restrictive educational setting. The management structure consisted of three organizational entities.

1. The administrative or management team initiated the model and was responsible for supporting systemic staff development programs. This team was composed of principals from each school building in the district, the superintendent and assistant superintendent, and the director of special education (if present in a particular district). The team first agreed on goals consistent with the individual district's needs assessment and created a structure similar to that described below (the core team and building-based teams). The management team also established differentiated roles for the core team and school-based teams as outlined below.

2. The district-wide or core team was responsible for all district staff development activities including the following specific areas:

   a. Assistance with reduction of work place stress through monitoring of needs assessment and facilitating fulfillment of teacher and student needs.

   b. Continued development of district-wide communications

   c. Identifying needs and applying for continued funding to support district inservice efforts

   d. Insuring that project activities were consistent with state and federal policies and regulations

   e. Creating linkages with other districts and state and federal projects to identify resources available to the particular district's project

   f. Providing for special interest groups by developing and/or approving staff development plans for such groups as were not considered part of any given school building (bus drivers, secretaries, custodians, cafeteria workers, itinerant personnel, etc.)

g. Developing procedures for distribution of resources (monetary if available and other resources) and determining amounts of funds to be retained for district level and special interest group staff development

h. Monitoring project budget (if existent) and use of funds distributed by core team

i. Evaluating staff development plans of each building based cadre

j. Determining procedures for evaluating individual teacher staff development plans

k. Developing and conducting evaluations of district and community-wide inservice activities.

The core team was typically composed of regular and special education teachers, one or more building principals, a school board member, the superintendent, the director of special education (if existent), and a parent of a special education child. Representation from each school was assured.

3. Building-based teacher assistance teams. These cadres included the building principal, at least one special educator, two or more regular educators, and counselors or other support staff.

The school-based TATs typically had the following responsibilities:

1. Monitoring building level inservice activities and any available building level inservice budget

2. Determining building needs and developing relevant proposals to meet such needs

3. Developing and implementing a system for supporting individual staff development activities

4. Assisting staff, substitute teachers, parents, and community volunteers to work as effective members of the educational team

5. Examining alternatives to improve teacher skills

6. Functioning as a peer problem-solving group

7. Using problem-solving skills to resolve classroom concerns by identifying, developing, and adapting curriculum methods and resources at the building level

8. Assisting the community in understanding more clearly the needs of handicapped children

9. Identifying staff development resources and making referral to such resources

The core and TAT cadres related to the district management team through the administrators on the core team and the principals on each TAT. The organizational structure for this systemic change process is illustrated below.

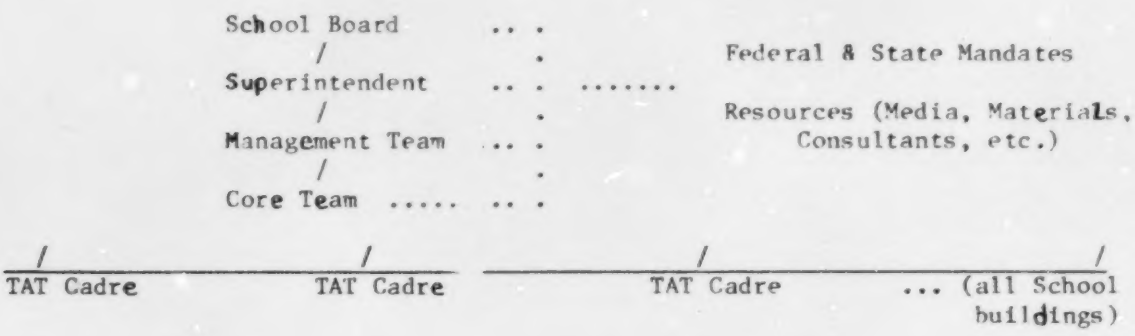

Figure 1. Organizational structure of systemic change process.

Teacher Assistance Teams (TATs) facilitated meeting identified educational needs of children through school based planning. This included involvement of TAT members with classroom teachers to resolve the concerns of special needs children. The TATs provided teachers and supporting personnel opportunities to explore educational alternatives through visitation and consultation.

Programs and resources at the building level were negotiated by TAT members where appropriate with the core team. Each building also negotiated for any available core team funds by establishing needs and identifying best methods of meeting identified needs.

Ultimately, an ongoing inservice training program was established in each building within the district. Involvement of the entire staff of smaller schools and of many community members facilitated real ownership at the local level of projects designed to meet local needs. This ownership and the coordinated attempts of buildings to solve their own problems consistent with district-wide approaches facilitated systemic change. The core team was able to identify common district needs and prevent duplication of inservice efforts. Occasional district-wide meetings of all TATs as well as other inter-school and teacher-teacher interfaces created linkages for continuous individual professional growth and district-wide communication as well as consistenty of processes.

A requirement that individual teachers supported in any way (release time, funding, etc.) by the TAT or core committees share learnings with other teachers also facilitated system-wide change and growth. Minutes of the district core committee were disseminated to all interested teachers to facilitate communication.

Considerable training was necessary before initiation and during implementation of these concepts. Training needs varied from district to district. Some districts required rudimentary training regarding decision-making and conflict resolution strategies, parliamentary procedure, or minute-taking and reporting.

A district-wide retreat was held in the districts as part of the project's initiation. The goal of the retreat was to establish understanding of the model to be initiated; to increase cooperation and collaboration among individuals, schools, and within the central office; to train staff for the team building process; and to resolve interpersonal and interprofessional hidden agendae. It was critical that the management team have

previously set ground rules and that staff be informed of those ground rules during the retreat. (For example, defining parameters of acceptable staff development activities and establishing guidelines for allocation of decision-making authority.) The core teams also participated in a round of open decision making during the retreat so that the TATs could observe the core group's processes and have a true picture of its functioning.

Others secured skill training regarding negotiating with peers; methods of staff development planning; establishing resource networks within their buildings; clarifying participant roles; techniques for motivating peers; evaluation procedures; and team development skills.

Common problems to preclude were (1) closed decision making based on fears of peer reprisal yet debilitative of trust levels and (2) initiation of cumbersome decision-making processes including heavy paperwork. The core groups and TATs were trained to emphasize coordination versus administrative functions and developed skills to equitably foster individual and school building staff development proposals. As the goal of the TATs was to function as a true assistance team, it was important for their members to continue to focus upon facilitative processes.

The strategies described above have emphasized skill development at the district and building levels in the areas of needs assessment, goal setting, effective staff development procedures for rural areas, and monitoring systems interrelating needs assessment, program planning, and evaluation. The TAT structure was consistent with research indicating that an individual school building is the most viable unit for change and improvement.

At the same time, the entire model within each district was based on individualizing inservice models for particular district and building subcultures.

Model B

1. Initiating a Management Information System to optimize school and community resources

A comprehensive Management Information System (MIS) to optimize school and community resources and efforts to implement special education mandates in ways beneficial to all students was initiated within individual schools/total districts. Processes used in initiating the MIS are briefly described below:

A. Conducting a needs assessment at the total school and individual classroom level, using processes that relate assessed needs to program planning and evaluation procedures.

B. Conducting a resource survey of all school personnel, listing skills and competencies that may be shared with others and/or used with children with educational problems. Community and parent data are included in the MIS data base.

C. Via a manual card sorting or a computerized retrieval system, linking identified resources and needs. Wherever possible, relating resources to IEPs and to identified needs of individual non-handicapped students. (For example, linking one teacher who needs to see an effective demonstration of Task Analysis and implementation of Applied Behavioral Analysis with another teacher who uses these skills frequently and effectively with handicapped and non-handicapped students. Facilitating this interchange by using a retired teacher, a parent volunteer, and/or an unemployed certified teacher to manage the former teacher's classroom while he observes the latter.)

D. Asking school personnel and community volunteers their particular areas of expertise which can be shared with others is a complimentary approach, building favorable attitudes of those groups toward school leadership personnel. Simultaneously, an evolving foundation of school resources is established which is easily evaluated.

In some districts, the MIS was linked with the core team and TATs to facilitate their linking identified needs and resources. Inservice training thus used local resources as much as possible. More importantly, this cost-efficient system was used to temporarily replace the classroom teacher while he or she learned another skill.

This system created optimal community-school interfaces and facilitated design of creative inservice programs at the local level, identifying personnel resources which were brought to bear on individual educational dilemmas. (E.g., discovering that a severely cerebral palsied child was to attend school on an island having only one special education teacher trained in learning disabilities.) One district instituted the MIS as a permanent system of "floating substitutes."

The MIS concept was optimally used on a region-wide basis, although software can be easily developed for individual schools and their constituents.

Some districts implemented the MIS concept in segments. I.e., beginning with listings of available unemployed certified or retired teachers and gradually enlarging to include other community resources. Some districts involved high school students engaged in computer science courses and programming in retrieving information for the MIS and some have involved local business personnel.

Uses have ranged from scheduling two to three study periods in common or organizing group assemblies or mini-courses for students so that a relatively large group of teachers could be released for staff development opportunities involving entire communities in school staff development efforts.

Resources were catalogued, including audiovisual, media, teacher aides and tutors, facilities, and professional materials. Teachers were trained to locate, adapt or write computer programs for their individual use.

The systems were also used for data storage such as recording frequencies of formal contacts (communication improvements) between regular and special educators or numbers of parent education efforts.

Districts instituted training and screening procedures where needed for volunteers to be used in the classrooms so that both the school and the volunteers felt comfortable with their rotating responsibilities.

Model C

Trainer-of-Trainers Approach

This model was used on district-specific and statewide bases. Persons trained to function as process facilitators in local districts included LEA, university, state education agency, and regional resource system or network personnel. These personnel were trained to support staff development efforts with LEA systems via a process consultation model.

The groups focused on team development and interagency collaboration internally before working with target districts. Careful planning resulted in the inclusion of team members with both positional and personal (legitimated) influence to optimally develop ownership and commitment. Extensive school communication and feedback systems with staffs, school boards, and communities were extensive as cadres of multi-disciplinary and interagency personnel collaborated with local districts attempting to establish effective staff development programs. All trainer cadres involved in the trainer of trainers model periodically participated in central meetings

to (1) refresh their skills, (2) engage in peer problem-solving, and (3) reinforce the group's priority of enhancing local district capacities via the process consultation versus expert or "medical" consultation model.

Summary

Rural school literature has generally expressed the need to find alternatives which are not ideal but which hopefully will suffice. These models stem from value systems emphasizing (1) identification of resources as well as needs, (2) environmental monitoring of the local culture of a particular district and community subculture, and (3) identification of creative alternatives for use in the specific district, analyzing effectiveness as well as cost-efficiency.

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